



## WOUNDED WARRIOR

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## AF releases next volume of its Portraits in Courage

WASHINGTON -- The Air Force released its ninth volume of Portraits in Courage, highlighting five teams and seven individual Airmen for their honor, valor, devotion and selfless sacrifice in the face of extreme danger to themselves and others.

"Each story graphically depicts an Airman's will to do the right thing, when it mattered most, and to selflessly accept risk for the life of another," wrote Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Mark A. Welsh III and Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force James A. Cody in the volume's preface. "Our Airmen face these situations each and every day around the globe. Each of them

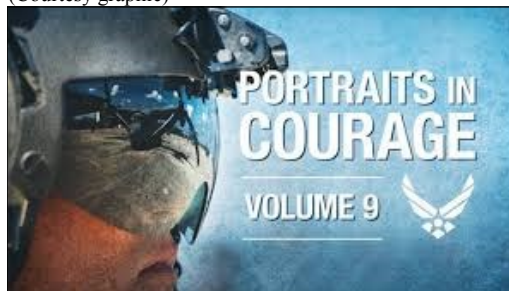
has their own story. In fact, it would take many volumes to highlight them all."

### [Portraits In Courage - Video](#)

The 24 recipients represent multiple major commands and career fields including security forces, combat control, pararescue, explosive ordnance disposal and others.

"We believe in them -- not just for who they are, but for what they represent," Welsh said. "They believe in integrity, in service, in excellence and are ready and willing to go in harm's way. They continue to strengthen the spirit of our nation and have earned our highest degree of trust."

(Courtesy graphic)



All of this year's Portraits in Courage stories and profiles from previous volumes are featured on the Air Force Portraits in Courage website.

To read more about the team or individual stories, click [here](#).

#### Send your comments, feedback

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# Airman finds balance after diagnosis

by Tech. Sgt. Vanessa Kilmer  
92nd Air Refueling Wing Public Affairs

FAIRCHILD AIR FORCE BASE, Wash. -- Senior Master Sgt. Daphne Soto never meets a stranger because each encounter opens a door to a potential new friend, or to someone who just needs to talk, and she'll keep the door open for both.

This 24-year Air Force veteran will weave a serpentine path through cubicles and offices just to say hello to every Airman, regardless of rank. Her conversations are sprinkled with laughter and seasoned with southern flavor when she reveals her roots with the occasional use of the word, "child."

For Soto, the 92nd Air Refueling Wing Equal Opportunity director, it's not just part of her job. A self-proclaimed "sweet girl from South Carolina," Soto has always held tight to one goal from the moment she enlisted: to always give her personal best.

Soto said she knew her lofty goals would require more attention, and possibly sacrifices, but she didn't recognize the magnitude of the impending imbalance. Her aspirations formed blinders that cloaked lost time with her family, and shrouded symptoms as her body began to rebel against her.

Early in her career, as a telephone switch operator ("Operator 22") and then as combat crew communications, her ambition was the ever-present shove toward more responsibility.

"I wanted to be the chief master sergeant of the Air Force," she said. "I think everyone's had that little moment."

Soto's appetite for responsibility left her family hungry for her presence back home.

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***It was just 30 minutes between the beginning of the examination and the diagnosis she had begun to expect -- cancer.***

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As a mother of three and wife of an active-duty crew chief, she described 12-hour days that didn't end when she returned home. She said she would bring work with her, and take phone calls on her home phone, even late in the evening. This was when cellphones were new, she noted.



Senior Master Sgt. Daphne Soto spent 18 years of her career on the fast track until a diagnosis forced her to find balance between work, family and herself. Today, Soto dedicates her time to helping Airmen find balance and prepare them for life beyond the Air Force. (U.S. Air Force photo/Staff Sgt. Alexandre Montes)

"I've always tried to be a good mom, and a good wife and a great Airman," she said. "But I soared at a cost ... because I sacrificed all of that precious family time. I was on every TDY; I never turned down an opportunity. There was a time that my husband and I weren't even seeing each other. I would kiss my kids goodnight, read a quick bedtime story and then get right back on the phone."

She was on that cycle for almost 18 years, which she admitted took a toll on her as well.

"When you're used to being that go-to person and having to live up to that expectation, and not being able to say no -- it takes a lot," she said.

"And then you find yourself saying, 'You've got to say no.'"

Soto said she justified this brutal schedule

because she saw it as purpose, a part of her legacy.

"I thought I was being a role model to my children, and making my husband proud being

that breadwinner," she said. "So you lie to yourself. You lie to yourself to say, it's all worth it in the end. You convince yourself that it's going to justify it all once you hit that goal."

For almost 20 years, Soto charged through, made rank, earned more awards and accolades, with the

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# 75-day leave carryover ends Sept. 30

by Debbie Gildea  
Air Force Personnel Center Public  
Affairs

JOINT BASE SAN ANTONIO-RANDOLPH, Texas - Effective Sept. 30, military members will no longer be able to carry more than 60 days of leave into the next fiscal year, in accordance with 2013 National Defense Authorization Act requirements.

Unless they are approved for special leave accrual, regular Air Force and Active Guard Reserve, or AGR, members who have more than 60 days of leave must use it or lose it by Oct. 1, 2015.

The 2010 NDAA included a provision that allowed members to carry up to 75 days of leave forward to the new fiscal year because of limited leave opportunities tied to deployments and other mission

requirements. The 2013 NDAA extended that provision through the end of fiscal 2015.

"Airmen need to be aware of the change so that they can plan leave accordingly and ensure their leave balance is 60 days or fewer by the end of the fiscal year," said 1st Lt. Nate Strickland, the Air Force Personnel Center special programs branch chief. "Even if you don't have more than 60 days now, by Sept. 30, you may accrue enough leave time to be over the limit."

Some reserve members could be affected as well, said Lt. Col. Belinda Petersen, Air Reserve Personnel Center public affairs.

"All Reserve members accrue leave when they are on active duty orders for 30 days or longer; and Active Guard Reserve members accrue leave

the same way regular Air Force members do, so the extension expiration will affect them," she said. "If you aren't sure whether or not you're affected, you should talk to your supervisor or contact your military personnel section for information."

Members who have approved special leave accrual are exempted from the use-or-lose rule, Strickland said. Special leave accrual approval is for members who couldn't use their leave because of national emergency, crisis, catastrophe or national security situations.

"SLA is only granted when Airmen cannot take leave under those circumstances," the lieutenant said.

For more information about military benefits, like leave, or other personnel issues, click [here](#). (Courtesy of Air Force News Service)

## Prescription tracker gives veterans 24/7 access to status

WASHINGTON -- Veterans can now track the status of most of their prescriptions online, thanks to an innovative idea by a Department of Veterans Affairs' employee. The new 24/7 service allows online tracking for most prescriptions mailed from the VA Mail Order Pharmacy.

The prescription tracker was recommended by VA employee Kenneth Siehr, a winner of the President Obama's 2013 Securing Americans Value and Efficiency Award. Siehr's idea focused on the use of technology as a way to save money and improve the services VA provides to its patients.

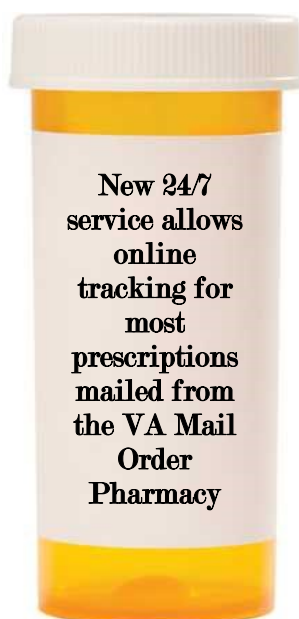
"Our nation's veterans deserve a first-class pharmacy and quality customer service as a part of the exceptional health care available from VA," said Siehr, the national director for Consolidated Mail Outpatient Pharmacies. "It is an honor to be part

of serving veterans and to have been recognized for an idea that enhances our services to them."

More than 57,000 veterans are currently using the service through [My Health"e"Vet](#), an online feature that allows veterans to partner with their health care team. The number is expected to grow as VA starts to educate veterans about the new feature. Later this month, the tracking feature will include images of the medication that is being dispensed.

Over the next year, a secure messaging alert will be added so that veterans know when a medication was placed in the mail.

"VA prescription refills online is an excellent example of how one employee looked at the process of VA prescription tracking through the eyes of our veterans and came up with an idea that better serves veterans," said



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## Services and Resources

[Vets4Warriors](#) is a national call center that provides a confidential peer-to-peer support for active-duty service members, National Guard and Reserve members, and their families. Spouses, parents, siblings or other family members can contact Vets4Warriors if they are concerned about their service member or if they are facing problems of their own. Vets4Warriors is staffed with veterans and military family members who provide support by engaging callers in a personal, non-threatening way. This peer-support network is confidential and caller information is be shared with the military or Veterans Affairs. For issues requiring specific expertise, such as financial resources, legal advice or medical services, veteran peers will work to find the best options for a caller and help make connections in for his or her local community. People can call 855-838-8255 to reach a counselor; send email to [info@Vets4Warriors.com](mailto:info@Vets4Warriors.com); or use the online chat on the [Vets4Warriors website](#).



The [Veteran Tickets Foundation](#), aka Vet Tix, is a nonprofit Veterans Support Organization whose mission is to "give something to those who gave." Vet Tix provides free (and discounted) event tickets to sporting events, concerts and family activities for veterans, active-duty service members and primary next of kin of those killed in action. Membership is free and there are no obligations. Vet Tix has given out more than 1 million event tickets across all 50 states and Washington. For more information and to sign up, click [here](#).

## Airmen may apply for nuclear deterrence medal

by Debbie Gildea  
Air Force Personnel Center Public Affairs

JOINT BASE SAN ANTONIO-RANDOLPH, Texas -- Airmen who meet eligibility criteria may now submit an application for the newly approved Nuclear Deterrence Operations Service Medal, Air Force officials announced.

Eligibility is retroactive to Dec. 27, 1991 for active-duty, Air National Guard, Air Force Reserve, retired and separated Airmen and family of deceased Airmen. Airmen who qualify for the medal can apply on the [myPers website](#).

### Basic medal eligibility

The medal may be awarded to Airmen who were assigned, deployed or mobilized to a unit (wing, center or below) in support of the Nuclear Enterprise for 120 consecutive days or 179 nonconsecutive days; were subject to a nuclear inspection or performed duties in one of the following:

- ◆ Nuclear Operations
- ◆ Nuclear Weapon Storage Facilities
- ◆ Nuclear Command, Control and Communication
- ◆ Cyber Surety
- ◆ Security
- ◆ Safety
- ◆ Transportation Maintenance
- ◆ Facility Management and Maintenance
- ◆ Explosive Ordnance Disposal
- ◆ Aircrew Certified for Support to Nuclear Operations
- ◆ Weapons Loaders
- ◆ Warning and Attack Assessment
- ◆ Personnel Reliability Program Management
- ◆ Research Development and Acquisition of Nuclear Systems

### "N" device eligibility

An "N" will be worn by Airmen who dispatched to a missile complex for 179 nonconsecutive days in direct support of intercontinental ballistic missile operations and performed duties in one of the following Air Force specialty codes:

- ◆ 21MX, 2M0XX - Missile Maintenance



Nuclear Deterrence Operations Service Medal. (Courtesy graphic)

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## Special Events

# Program uses mountains to battle adversity

No Barriers Warriors is a program that empowers veterans and transitioning service members with disabilities -- as well as survivors of the fallen -- to break through barriers, find their inner purpose, and contribute their very best to the world.

The program helps disabled veterans of all military branches tackle personal challenges. Mountains serve as both metaphor and training ground for stretching goals, building world-class teams, innovating through adversity and stepping up to lead and serve others. The program integrates with the rehab process and helps people restructure how they approach their past and future. Through the No Barriers Warriors experience, veterans are provided with camaraderie and support systems they can depend on.

Journey-based expeditions range from one day to three weeks long, and have taken participants to Nepal, Ecuador, Peru, and the South Pole.

Programs are free and involve an application and selection process on an individual basis. For more information, click [here](#).



(Courtesy photo)

The Air Force Wounded Warrior program offers several social media outlets for people to learn more about the program and communicate with each other. Just click on an icon:



## Do you need to update your contact information?

**NOTE - Updates should be provided to: AFW2 Program Office, AFPC Disabilities Branch, DEERS, DFAS, and the VA.**

AFW2 Program Office – Call **800-581-9437** or via email: [wounded.warrior@us.af.mil](mailto:wounded.warrior@us.af.mil)

AFPC Disabilities Branch for people on the Temporary Disability Retired List – Email [disability@us.af.mil](mailto:disability@us.af.mil)

Based on the last four digits of your Social Security number, call:

(0001-2499) **210-565-5561** (2500-4999) **210-565-5564** (5000-7499) **210-565-5562** (7500-9999) **210-565-5660**

DEERS – Updating info in DEERS is accomplished in one of three ways:

Call **800-538-9552**

Visit a military base ID card issuance facility

Visit the website at: <https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/milconnect/faces/index.jspx?>

DFAS – Online at “myPay” website: <https://mypay.dfas.mil>

VA – Call **800-827-1000** or visit [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov) for the nearest VA office

